

The National Awards Program for Model Professional Development

Background:

The National Awards Program for Model Professional Development began in 1996 to highlight and recognize schools and school districts with exemplary professional development programs. The program identifies a variety of comprehensive models of pre-K-12 professional development that exemplify the Department's Mission and Principles of Professional Development. Consistent with the Mission and Principles, these models are broadly focused: they have professional growth as an integral part of school culture, address the needs of ALL students, and promote professional development practices that ensure equity by being free of bias and accessible to all educators. Recognition under the awards program is based on how well applicants demonstrate that their professional development programs result in increased student outcomes.

Abstracts of 1996-1997 National Awards Program Winners:

- **Woodrow Wilson Elementary Schools
Manhattan, KS**
- **Lawrence, Kansas School District
Lawrence, KS**
- **Wilton, Connecticut School District
Wilton, CT**
- **Samuel Mason Elementary School
Roxbury, MA**
- **San Francisco Unified School District
San Francisco, CA**

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Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Manhattan, Kansas: Profile of Award-Winning Professional Development

Woodrow Wilson is one of 13 district schools. Manhattan, Kansas is a small university town (Kansas State University) surrounded by rural communities. Wilson, a K-6 school with 320 students.

Demographics:

- 80% White (not Hispanic origin)
- 3% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 1% Native American or Native Alaskan
- 15% African American
- 1% Hispanic
- 1% Limited English Proficient Students (2 languages spoken)
- 44% Qualify for free/reduced lunch
- 30% Receive special education services

Critical Factors That Led to Developing a Professional Development Model:

1. The Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) initiative adopted by the State Board of Education holds schools accountable for demonstrating student progress and mandates both site- based councils and school improvement plans. The QPA also requires a professional development component that must connect these activities with their impact on instructional strategies. This state initiative served to facilitate site-based decision making and focus thinking on individual school improvement strategies.
2. Three teachers focused their efforts on directing the faculty to reflect on the meaning and subsequent improvement of low student scores (initially) in fourth-grade math and science. Following a Summer Magnet School for mathematics and problem solving (involving voluntary participation by students and teachers), teachers in all grades embarked on a year-long a study of ways to implement the National Council of Teachers' of Mathematics (NCTM) standards school-wide.
3. Wilson was invited by Kansas State University (KSU) to become a Professional Development School. This initiative involved a number of components that served to focus the energy of the Wilson faculty on developing a plan for professional development and raising questions about the ways to improve student performance in the targeted areas (e.g., a Wilson teacher was appointed a Clinical Instructor, with KSU supporting her half time out of the classroom; KSU faculty worked alongside several Wilson teachers with preservice and inservice teachers; KSU students, working alongside Wilson teachers, sponsored after-school clubs focused on math and science which extended the learning time for students).

Framework for Professional Development Model:

The content of the school improvement plan is developed by teachers after analysis of student achievement data and a survey requesting teachers' priorities for professional development. Summer study groups and action research projects fuel this discussion and planning. Teachers use a combination of two 90-minute blocks of time each month (the time is recovered for professional development by reducing monthly faculty meetings from four to two), as well as creative use of KSU students and selective use of substitute teachers to craft opportunities for professional development activities. An important time for teachers to practice instructional innovations and to do peer observations is created by the after-school clubs designed around math and problem solving. This is a volunteer activity for teachers and KSU students.

The Clinical Instructor (CI) is a key actor in this professional development plan. Released half time from the classroom (with funding from the KSU Professional Development School initiative), the CI facilitates the activities that have been focused on math and science problem solving. In addition, the CI has coordinated field experiences in the school, taught university seminars and math and science methods courses, and mentored preservice and inservice teachers. In particular, the Wilson faculty has focused on problem solving in math, hands-on science, collaboration and networking, and raising expectations concerning students.

The professional development activities developed by the Professional Development Committee at Wilson are forwarded yearly to the District Professional Development Council (comprising teacher representatives from each school, administrators and central office personnel). Here school plans are assessed for their incorporation of district and state goals and for their efficient use of professional development funds. The District Staff Development Office offers support primarily in the areas of evaluation and assessment, and "capacity building workshops" (e.g., performance assessment, integrated curriculum, collaborative teaching, and development learner outcomes). A trainer of trainers model is used. The Manhattan District is an active member in the KAW Valley Inservice Consortium, and in the "writing and performance assessment consortiums" of KWAC and KPAC.

Wilson has used a combination of Kansas's assessment tests, curriculum tests, and performance-based tests to monitor the impact of their work in math and problem solving on student achievement. They have posted large gains on the Kansas math tests (especially for girls) and now plan to use the same professional development strategies to focus on reading and social studies.

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Lawrence, Kansas School District: Profile of Award-Winning Professional Development

The Lawrence, Kansas (PreK-12) School District serves a university community (University of Kansas) in a moderately urban, mid-size city setting. Rapid growth (thirty percent in the population in the last decade), and high community expectations for education set the environmental context. The district comprises 24 schools with an enrollment of 9,872 students.

Demographics:

- 81% White (not Hispanic)
- 9% African American
- 4% Native American or Native Alaskan
- 3% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 2% Hispanic
- 3% Limited English Proficient Students (36 languages spoken)
- 28% Qualify for free/reduced lunch
- 20% Receive special education services

Critical Factors That Led to Developing a Professional Development Model:

1. The Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) Initiative adopted by the State Board of Education holds schools accountable for demonstrating student progress, and mandates both site-based councils and school improvement plans. The state also requires that professional development initiatives connect activities with impact on instructional strategies and student achievement. Lawrence volunteered to pilot this accreditation model and has added more schools each year. Thus, the idea of student-focused, data-driven professional development has been institutionalized in the district for several years.
2. A central office staff (currently comprised of a director of evaluation and standards, two instructional skills coordinators, and several curriculum specialists) has developed a strong theoretical base for integrating instructional improvement, curriculum development and professional development. Several methods have been developed to support teachers and other district personnel as they engage in reflection and planning for change. The emphasis is on sustaining a program that is ongoing, comprehensive, and job-embedded.
3. The district has been able to protect the funding for professional development activities even during those times when bond issues have been difficult to pass. Professional development has a high priority in the district. Current funding comes from a number of sources: State Excellence Grants, fifty percent match from State Professional Development Funds, Title II (math and science), and business partnerships.

Building on their experience with the pilot for the QPA, all schools are now required to craft a school improvement plan each year that details the connection between professional development and student achievement. Three different data sources are used: norm-referenced CTBS; state assessments in writing, math, science and social studies; and local assessments in math and reading. A local School Inservice Council that is comprised of teachers, principals, parents, and community representatives develops the plan and then forwards it for review to the Local (district) Inservice Council (LIC) which is comprised of teachers from each school, administrators, curriculum coordinators and early childhood specialists. The 32 member LIC meets monthly and provides an opportunity for both oversight and cross-school sharing/collaboration. It is here that an assessment is made concerning the inclusion of state and district goals, as well as approvals secured concerning travel, and so on. Each school must detail plans to use the six half days set aside by the district for professional development; the district staff will plan for two or three additional days. In addition to school plans, teachers should submit individual professional development plans that require support beyond that provided in the school plan.

Framework for Professional Development Model:

Four components are key to the success of the model. First, all teachers new to the district must complete a New Staff Instructional Skills Program within their first two years. This program is directed by an instructional skills coordinator and involves the teachers in six (released) days of intensive work designed to introduce them to the district and develop a common language about effective instruction. Teachers prepare a series of videos and action plans focused on instruction. Second, BLIS (Building Level Instructional Skills) groups can be formed at the building level to explore self-identified issues that are connected to the school improvement plan. Typically six teachers and the principal engage with an instructional skills coordinator for six half days (released). Third, a professional development library of mixed media is housed at the central office. The library contains an extensive collection of books, periodicals, tapes, video material, and CD-ROMs. Schools are encouraged to use this material and/or to order additional items. Finally, central office staff is available for consultation with schools. The emphasis is on in-district capacity building through a trainer of trainers approach. Several cadres of trainers are sustained in the district (e.g., direct instruction, action research, curriculum assessment/development and evaluation).

Schools use a variety of methods to create time for professional development. Several schools use a weekly early dismissal plan, other schools use creative block scheduling to create common planning time, while others create “buddy classes” to permit primary and intermediate grade teachers to share work time. In all cases this work is student-focused and driven by analysis of data concerning student achievement. At the end of the year each school must make a presentation to the Local (district) Inservice Council detailing the effectiveness of the plan for that year. This “results-based” planning and evaluation focuses attention both on student achievement data and on levels of implementation by teachers of strategies detailed in the school improvement plans.

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Wilton, Connecticut School District: Profile of Award-Winning Professional Development

The Wilton, Connecticut (PreK-12) School District serves a predominately professional/managerial community with a high percentage of commuters to nearby New York City. This affluent suburban area has a high concentration of college-educated residents; there are high community expectations for education, together with a strong local support for the continuing professional development of teachers. The district comprises five schools with an enrollment of 3,100 students.

Demographics:

- 94% White (not Hispanic)
- 3% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 1% African American
- 1% Hispanic
- .2% Limited English Proficient Students (2 languages)
- .5% Qualify for free/reduced lunch
- 13% Receive special education services

Critical Factors That Led to Developing a Professional Development Model:

1. A district professional development plan was developed beginning in 1990 that aligned a series of district-sponsored activities to district goals. Math and science were the areas of initial emphasis.
2. Wilton schools serve a community with very high expectations for education. As a consequence, both standards and rewards reflect the competitive nature of the surrounding communities. The district fosters an ethic of continuous personal improvement. Teaching positions in the Wilton schools are highly contested. There were more than 800 applicants last year.
3. A lengthened workweek, moving from 37.5 to 40 hours, reflects a commitment to the importance of ongoing professional development. It also creates a means to sustain professional development activities across the school year.

Framework for Professional Development Model:

School Planning Teams (comprising teachers, administrators and parents) develop school improvement plans that are driven by four factors: district goals, curricular needs, student assessment data and teacher performance needs. Historically, two or three initiatives receive attention for two or three years resulting in a series of specific in-house workshops focused on improving teacher effectiveness. In addition, a District Professional Development Committee (comprising teachers, administrators and parents, and chaired by a full-time teacher holding the title “Instructional Leader for Professional Development”)

develops the district-sponsored activities based on a district needs assessment survey and discussions concerning best practice. This district committee plans the Professional Development Day, held in August each year. (Topics this year included technology, reading and writing across the curriculum, school climate, inclusion, student assessment, and learning styles to motivate students.) It also plans a series of high interest strands addressed throughout the year. A bimonthly newsletter, distributed by the district administrator for professional development, lists all the conference and workshop opportunities available in the state and beyond. Time for these activities are created by banking hours in designated months for professional development. No school or district meetings are scheduled during the months of October, January and April. Consequently, the district has been able to schedule multiple workshops each week during these three months. Professional development has included the training of new teachers in current programs, workshops for teachers in new curriculum, and the opportunity for individual schools to explore those areas of greatest importance to them.

The district supports a trainer of trainers approach to capacity building: instructional leadership is encouraged in the district. More than 40 teachers currently hold instructional leader roles (e.g., grade-level or cross-grade team leaders, curriculum coordinators and special program directors) in addition to their regular teaching responsibilities. Also, nearly 60 teachers have completed the state-sponsored BEST program which qualifies them to be mentors of new teachers. New teachers are required to successfully complete this program in order to receive a provisional certificate. The BEST program involves the veteran and new teacher in the areas of peer coaching, team teaching, and using instructional resources. All teachers in the district are required to report back to their peers the connection between the school/district improvement plan and what they learned from each professional development activity they attend. This includes sponsored activities such as sabbaticals, mini-sabbaticals, conferences, workshops and TI-IN distance learning (any or all of which might be used towards Continuing Educational Units).

An analysis of test data has been the primary catalyst for professional development activities. Three questions have been asked concerning both state and national tests: (a) how does the district compare nationally with similar suburban districts and independent private schools? (b) what are the districts strengths and weaknesses in each grade level as they reflect on curriculum? and (c) what is the growth of each individual in each subject area? Math emerged as an area of concern, and after much discussion the district adopted the Chicago Math program. Following extensive professional development, including sending a team to work for a week at the University of Chicago with the program developers, the program has been introduced through the grades. Last year the high school SAT math scores were the highest in Connecticut, and eighth grade math students ranked first in the state on the Connecticut Mastery Test. A similar strategy has been used when writing surfaced as an area of concern. All teachers received a series of workshops focused on the elements of good writing and a common rubric was developed for Grades 3 through 12. Significant gains have subsequently been recorded on the Connecticut State Mastery Test in writing.

The district plans to focus attention on several “high priority” issues next year: reading K-5, assessment, technology and special needs students. The Professional Development Day in August is used to frame these issues for the schools who will then plan to connect these issues to their own priorities. Focusing attention and support on a few clearly defined improvement activities is an important cornerstone of the Wilton professional development model.

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Samuel Mason Elementary School, Roxbury, Massachusetts: Profile of Award-Winning Professional Development

Samuel Mason is a controlled choice school in the Boston Public Schools. The school sits in an old warehouse district and draws students from several nearby housing projects. A large proportion of students are of Cape Verdean decent, and there is a high percentage of parents who are unemployed. Mason, a K-5 school with 296 students.

Demographics:

71% African American
14% White (not Hispanic)
11% Hispanic
2% Asian or Pacific Islander
2% Native American or Native Alaskan
23% Limited English Proficient Students (5 languages spoken)
74% Qualify for free/reduced lunch
26% Receive special education services

Critical Factors That Led to Developing a Professional Development Model:

The appointment of a new principal in 1990 saved the school from closure. This principal had a vision that incorporated a belief in site-based management and concern for all the students in the building. Under this new leadership, in five years (1991-96), Mason went from the least chosen (79th) to the 12th most selected school in Boston, while more than doubling its enrollment from 133 to 296 students. The groundwork for the professional development model was begun in 1990 with the creation of the School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making Team. The initial focus for this group was school improvement in instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

2. The threat of closure served as a catalyst to rethink “business as usual” at Mason. The conversation focused on how better to serve the students in the building. Issues concerning reading, writing and problem solving, as well as parental involvement in schooling, emerged as primary concerns.

3. The commitment of the teachers at Mason to raising the achievement of all students proved to be an important factor in the subsequent development of a professional development model that is grounded in analyzing student achievement data and using research on best practices to reform instruction.

Framework for Professional Development Model:

The Professional Development Team (comprising teachers, principal and parents) prepares the yearly school improvement plan that aligns professional development activities with

the goals for student achievement. All the staff in the school, including the school secretary and the principal, are also required to complete personal professional development plans. Several blocks of time are used at Mason to address the professional development needs of teachers. First, summer and release-day time is used for schoolwide work. Mason has embraced much of the Accelerated Schools model for school improvement (schoolwide work has included a focus on the principles of accelerated learning, project-based learning, technology as a learning tool, and alternative assessment strategies). Second, creative scheduling is used to enable both grade-level teams and study groups to meet once a week during the school day; typically, a single issue is investigated across the school year. In addition, teachers frequently meet both before and after school to incorporate readings, discussion and the use of consultants in problem solving. Third, lead teachers in each subject area are available to assist teachers in incorporating new practices into their classrooms. These lead teachers engage in direct instruction, team-teaching, mentoring/consultation, and participation in common planning. Fourth, time is created for teachers to visit each other's classrooms (for observation and peer coaching), as well other exemplary classrooms within and outside the Boston Public School system. Finally, teachers are supported to make professional presentations at both regional and national meetings.

Mason staff have been particularly resourceful in locating funding to support this range of professional development activities. The budget draws revenue from the City of Boston General School Purposes Fund, Massachusetts Department of Education's Education Reform and Restructuring Network, Federal Title I, and grant writing. A partnership with John Hancock also provides an invaluable in-kind support for summer externships that team teachers with parents. Two important components of the program supported because of this resourcefulness are the involvement of parents in programming (e.g., monthly parent workshops and the school-based Family Center, offering weekly meetings to integrate all those adults who have an impact on student learning), and the after-school and Mason Summer Camp initiatives, which extend the learning opportunities for students.

Evaluation of the impact of the professional development activities is a high priority at Mason. This is noteworthy because the school has adopted a policy of including children with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities in all classrooms. Approximately a quarter of the students are classified as Limited English Proficient so a number of different indicators are used to measure success. Not surprisingly, reading and writing receive the major emphasis. Data from the Metropolitan Achievement Test in Reading Comprehension (a standardized test) show that Mason's average three year gain for Grades 2-5 surpassed that of the city of Boston. Also, data from a Grade 4 writing test developed by the Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy at Boston College show that in each of four subtests, Mason students exceeded the average score for the City of Boston and other urban school systems involved in the UDAC project. In addition to these measures, work-sampling assessment, portfolios, and twice-yearly exhibits of student's work in writing, art, and science show growth. To connect these data with professional development activities, grade-level teams monitor these data on a four-week cycle.

Adjustments are made to the content of the professional development program based on these periodic assessments.

Several programmatic initiatives designed to raise student achievement provide teachers additional opportunities to engage in professional development: student teachers and interns from local universities work with teachers to develop best practices to enhance student learning; teachers mentor a ten-member team of young adults (sponsored by a partnership with City Year) who spend a year assisting in classrooms; and teachers work with a large number of parent volunteers.

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San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco, California: Profile of Award -Winning Professional Development

The San Francisco School District serves a major urban community with a very diverse population. The district's enrollment of 63,961 students (PreK -12).

Demographics:

48% Asian or Pacific Islander
20% Hispanic
17% African American
13 % White (not Hispanic)
1% Native American or Native Alaskan
30% Limited English Proficient Students (39 languages spoken)
59% Qualify for free/reduced lunch
10% Receive special education services

Critical Factors That Led to Developing a Professional Development Model:

1. The current superintendent, Waldemar Rojas, issued a set of priorities that included raising the achievement of students scoring in the bottom quartile on standardized tests, developing instructional strategies to better meet the needs of all students, and improving the scope and effectiveness of professional development.
2. Each year the district must hire about 200 new teachers. Close to thirty-five percent of all teachers in the district have less than four years of experience. (This situation will be exacerbated in the 1998-99 school year when 450 new teachers will be needed to respond to the state initiative to reduce class size.) Such large numbers of novice teachers served as a catalyst for the district to develop effective professional development

Framework for Professional Development Model:

The framework for professional development in the district combines centralized activities with site-based initiatives. The Professional Development Initiative requires each school to analyze a broad range of student achievement data (desegregated by factors such as race, gender and quartile), rethink their curriculum, and create an improvement plan that connects activities with professional development plans. In the 25 professional development "model schools," for example, each school presents a preliminary plan for review to others in this grouping. This critical feedback is used by the planning committees in each school to refine the school improvement plan. This also provides an opportunity for schools to collaborate and share resources where appropriate. In the spring each school evaluates its plans and progress toward implementation by creating a portfolio that is once again submitted to peer schools for review.

Eight days are set aside in the school year for professional development. Three are used by the district (recent activities have included early literacy, biotechnology, mathematics, and technology) and follow the format of a summer institute, multiple follow-up sessions, and targeted on-site activities. One day is set aside for special education issues. The remaining four days are available for individual schools to use to meet their own professional development needs. In addition, schools are expected to engage in professional development activities beyond these four non-student days. Typically, schools use a combination of an early release and creative scheduling to focus on the high-priority areas identified in their improvement plans. Depending on the specific goals included in these plans, additional professional development might include all the faculty, grade level or action research teams, curriculum teams, or individuals. (Each teacher is required to complete an Individual Professional Growth Plan that connects the individual's interests with both the district and his/her school's priorities.)

Several other professional development initiatives in the district make important contributions to the goal of raising student achievement. The district sponsors an orientation for teachers new to the San Francisco Schools. In addition, teachers may join the Beginning Teachers Support and Assessment Program (BTSA), a State-initiated program, that involves novice teachers in an extended mentoring relationship with master teachers in the district. At the secondary level Site Support Teams have been identified to work with teachers to develop content and performance standards in areas targeted for improvement (literacy and math were the most recent areas). An extensive Learning Resource Bank has been created, comprising professional development and curriculum materials. Included are books, periodicals, tapes, model units and lessons, instructional and assessment materials, as well as electronic links to libraries and universities and so on.

The K-8 Mathematics Initiative serves as a good example of the way in which professional development in the district combines both centralized workshops with school site activity. During the summer a team of 200 teachers and administrators attended an institute focused on the new mathematics adoption K-8, instructional strategies for Limited English Proficient students, and bottom quartile improvement strategies. This team subsequently planned and delivered three district-wide professional development days designed for teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, and parents. (Additional parent/family sessions were offered at school-sites during the evenings and on Saturdays.) Teacher leaders from each school facilitated on-site follow-up that included issues such as family math, managing manipulatives, planning a standards-based math program, and assessing student growth. This initiative was supported by a number of local universities.

Test scores for reading and math on the CTBS have been used to show the impact of the professional development program. These data show that there has been a significant growth for all students in both areas for three consecutive years. Moreover, students attending "focus schools" with an emphasis on math and/or literacy show more than a year's growth for a year's instruction. This finding is especially encouraging since the emphasis is now on raising the performance level of the students in the bottom quartile. The emphasis on

elementary science is also beginning to show a change in classroom practice. Five years ago elementary teachers reported spending an average of less than 30 minutes each week on science. Currently, teachers are reporting an average of 140 minutes devoted to science.

The district plans to continue to refine this professional development model, giving schools more time, resources and technical assistance. Three areas will receive attention in the future: an administrators' institute, bilingual education, and technology.

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